

OLD D. C. LAW FORBIDS POSTERS DEPICTING LADIES IN TIGHTS BUT STAGE PICTURES ARE NEGLECTED AS THE FLAPPERS PASS BY

THEATER MANAGERS DESPERATE ABOUT WHAT NOT TO WEAR

Washington Once Had Cop Brigade Going About Pasting Strips of Blank Paper Over Young Ladies' Photos Emblazoned on Fences—Skirts and Tights of the Old Days Are Relegated to the Eskimo Girls by the Modern Miss, and Musical Comedy Producers Are Fighting the Battle Against Overwhelming Street Odds

DISARMAMENT may be an elusive dream, but disarmament has reached the final stage in a program adopted by the theater about twenty years ago. The show girl of today has discarded the heavy armor plate and whale-bone of the Spanish-American period—done away with the fanciful superstructure so popular in 1900—and stands bereft of all defense save the minimum required for police protection. This minimum, by the way, is just about enough material to make a rainy day tassel on substitute policeman's club.

It was somewhere along about the year of 1900 when a genuine spirit of reckless development began to manifest itself in a great many of the theatrical productions appearing in Washington. About twenty years before that, "The Black Crook" had appeared and stunned the National Theater-goers with a spectacular production, including a ballet in which twenty-five young women appeared, dressed in short skirts and pink tights. It was horrible. Angry old ladies dragged their delighted husbands bodily from the theater and for the following ten years the "Black Crook" Company was the topic of conversation in every bar-room and sewing circles in Washington.

Lotta, the San Francisco song bird, next dazed an indignant public by appearing on a local stage smoking a big black cigar and wearing a skirt which allowed about three inches of her limbs to be exposed to the audience. There were one or two other daring performers, who braved a jail sentence by attempting to put some pep into their work, but it was not until about the year of 1900 that the real crime wave in theatricals, hit Washington. "Little Egypt" started it by attempting to pull off a shimmy dance on the stage of Kernan's Theater. Richard Sylvester, our former handsome major of police, played a prominent part in putting her performance on the bum.

COPS LOVED JOBS. Rumors of the daring character of her act had preceded her, and upon the opening night of her engagement the house was crowded. The stage was packed with bluecoats who had been pleading with the major for weeks to detail them to the job. It was rumored that a number of Congressmen, who had failed to get seats, had used their pull with the chief and had themselves sworn in as special cops.

At the appointed hour the curtain went up and the dancer made her appearance. A gasp of delighted horror went up from the audience when they saw her costume. It consisted of a pink undershirt, partially covered with a green jacket, and a pair of pink tights, draped with a network of lace. She moved to the center of the stage and shivered her shoulders twice. That was enough for Dick and his bluecoats. Grasping their clubs the tighter and drawing their trusty revolvers, they rushed forward. The dancer was surrounded, and in spite of her protests, she was escorted around to the First precinct, where a cold-blooded captain demanded heavy bail. He happened to be about the only cop who had found it impossible to get off to see the show.

Next day the papers printed columns about it. All of the bluecoats, except the Congressmen, had their names on the front page and Dick Sylvester had his picture published in the same column with "Little Egypt." The dancer faced a judge that morning who had witnessed the performance the night before. After making her repeat it for the benefit of a bunch of delighted court attendants, he let her go with a small fine. She appeared at the theater at every performance during the week, but she confined her offering to an imitation of an Italian immigrant, much to the disappointment of the policemen on the stage.

Sam T. Jack next took his life in his own hands by shooting Fatima on to the stage of a local theater. She was a reckless young woman and she went through the same process as "Little Egypt." Then came the "Girl in Blue." She was pinched also and the local judge decided that he did not require a vacation and stuck on the job.

The folks of Washington began to wonder what the world was coming

too. Public meetings of indignation were held and preachers denounced the wave of immorality from the pulpits. Business men, who had always been "Johnny on the Spot" for dinner began telephoning anxious and suspicious wives they were detained downtown on business. Young women got in the habit of standing in open doorways and wondering why Willie and Georgie and Eddie didn't come around to see them any more. Delegations of women began to besiege Major Sylvester's headquarters, and it was at this point in his brilliant career, that his masses of dark curly hair, turned to a silver gray. He looked around to find some good-natured official to share his troubles. Inspector Swindell was noted, throughout the department, for his sunny disposition and so he became the goat.

Upon his broad shoulders descended the title of Official Censor and as such it was up to him to see that this new element in local theatricals was checked. Meantime the producers became bolder. The advertising matter of the shows kept pace and in many instances exceeded, in daring the performances themselves. The fronts of the theaters, billboards and even a few store windows actually displayed pictures and posters of young women in tights. Something had to be done about the matter, so a regulation was passed, declaring that upon the female form, the form had to be draped from the neck to one inch below the knee. Doubtless this regulation applied to all young women themselves also, but this was hardly necessary, because even the most daring theatrical girl of those days refused to display more than an inch or so of ankle when on the street even in stormy weather.

PAPERED EVERY LEG.

The regulation caused dismay in the hearts of the theatrical managers. Florenz Ziegfeld, the famous producer was among the first to feel the weight of it. One of his big "girlie" shows was booked to appear at a local theater and one week in advance of the date of its appearance, the billboards of the city were covered from end to end with beautiful twenty-four foot posters, depicting female loveliness in many poses. Each and every maiden was pictured wearing brilliant colored tights, with well shaped limbs shooting sideways, front ways and skyways.

A nameless sleuth discovered one of these boards early one Monday morning while hurrying home from a night trick at headquarters. After he had been revived at the corner bar-room (yes they were open then—he burned up the wire to headquarters. About a half hour later, a large force of men were reluctantly engaged in pasting long strips of white paper over every dainty leg in view.

Every board in the city received a dose of the same medicine. Censor Swindell was on the job. A few days later Mr. Ziegfeld and his bunch disembarked from a Baltimore and Ohio train at the old station at New Jersey avenue and C street northwest. Just across the way a large billboard held one of the posters, the original of which had kept a corps of artists busy for weeks in the paintshops. The producer gave one look and it took four porters, seven comedians and three chorus girls to hold him down. The creation of his brain had been put through Inspector Swindell's censoring process and now it greatly resembled one of Sam Lloyd's picture puzzles. Here and there a winsome face, supported by a neck and a small portion of waist, peeped demurely out from behind an overcoat of white paper strips. From the waist up they were physically perfect, but from the waist down, there

In Circle — Lotta, the San Francisco song-bird, who startled Washington audiences by showing her ankles and appearing upon the stage smoking a vicious black cigar—and, of course, the police charged with drawn revolvers. Contrast her costume with those of the two modern girls at the top.

was nothing to them. Closely following the merciless dictates of the law, the censor had amputated those dainty limbs with the skill of a Dr. Stanley White. All that day a young theatrical producer leaned against the bar in a prominent hotel, drinking cocktails and asking the bartender in what direction St. Elizabeth's Asylum for the Insane was located.

TREASURED MEMENTOS.

The advertising material of the other managers received the same treatment. Major Sylvester bought a bottle of hair dye and was his jaunty, smiling self once more. The censor's troubles were far from being over, however. Finding out that the billboards were guarded night and day, the manager of one company hit the forces of law and order a blow below the belt. He dressed a charming chorus girl up in a skirt that was slit half way to the knee and sent her out to take the evening's air. Her stroll up Pennsylvania avenue was in the nature of a riot.

A vigilant newsboy apprised the passing populace that there was something doing. The girl had not walked a block before she had plenty of company. Men of all ages, colors and conditions crowded in front of her and used their eyes to good advantage. Every now and then she stopped and handed out a little card bearing the name of the production she was appearing in. It is said that some very successful business men of the present day still have those cards tucked safely away with other treasured mementoes of a reckless past.

Two blocks had not been traveled when traffic was blocked and she sought safety and seclusion in a cab. Two minutes later the forces of law and order were on hand, but the

STARS OF OTHER DAYS HAD OTHER WAYS

Olga Mishka

Ernestine Myers



MABEL WITHEE IN A 1921 POSE

criminal had disappeared in the distance. For the next half hour the drug stores in the vicinity did a rushing business handing out remedies for twisted necks.

Ogram's store at the corner of Thirteenth street and Pennsylvania avenue was situated in the center of Washington's night life at that time. There was always something doing on that corner. One starless night about two weeks after the incident related above had occurred, two men were driven up to the corner in a closed carriage. While one kept a watchful eye open for a policeman, the other dragged, what looked like two women, dressed in short skirts, from the carriage and propped them up in front of the entrance to the drug store. They were wax dummies dressed in the height of fashion. A PHONY ABDUCTION.

An hour later the same carriage drew up at the corner and the same two young men emerged from its interior. The first visit had been a stealthy one, but upon this occasion the young fellows seemed to be filled with a desire for publicity and something which used to be sold in Shoemaker's emporium. With a wild whoop, they made for the wax maidens. Each man grabbed a girl about the waist and implanted a kiss upon her waxy lips. Then they carried the ladies to the carriage and placed them upright on the seats. The top of the carriage was thrown back, the driver whipped up his horses, and, with the young men yelling at the top of their voices, the strange procession went off down the Avenue at full speed.

A small crowd had witnessed the abduction in stupefied silence. There was a loud cry for help, in a woman's voice came from the fast-disappearing carriage. An alert citizen called headquarters, and soon a pair of bicycle policemen, accompanied by hundreds of pedestrians and fifty excited people in vehicles of almost every description, were speeding after the criminals. It was a night in July, but when the crowd reached Ninth street it began snowing. At least the streets were white, and when some of the curious stopped to examine the miracle, they discovered thousands and thousands of small white cards, bearing the name of a production, which littered the Avenue as far as the eye could see.

The wax dummies were discovered later on, down near the Peace Monument, but the culprits were never brought to justice. This latest disregard for the law seemed to discourage the forces of the censor. John Grievess drifted into Washington, and, looking the field over, started a burlesque stock company at the Bijou Theater, now known as the Folly and by many other names not of a complimentary nature. At the performance given by his company the girls actually wore skin tights and there was never a whisper of protest from the office of the censor. Getting away with it Grievess grew bold and decided to give sacred concerts on Sundays. On these occasions a concession was made to the forces of right and the members of the company appeared in street clothes without a bit of make-up.

MAGGIE MITCHELL, Reigning Soubrette of the '80's

Up in the censor's office there was a hurried call for books dealing with local laws on the question. Some one said he had heard of a regulation that assessed any person a pound of tobacco, who kept a place of amusement open on Sunday. All the books were gone over thoroughly, but this law could not be located. Grievess was a great tobacco chewer and always had plenty of the weed on his person. It was concluded that it would hardly look dignified for a copper to be drifting around collecting a pound of tobacco each Sunday, when he could be home sleeping. The conference decided that they were licked and John continued to run his sacred concerts and chew his tobacco.

P. B. Chase, who conducted a vaudeville theater in the building now known as Poli's Theater, next fell in line with the Sunday shows. The censor and his forces were routed. The "Girl in Blue" hearing that Washington was now wide open, returned to town and was allowed to do a modest shimmy at a

local theater without being molested by the police.

Gertrude Hoffman was then a chorus girl. Max Hoffman, her husband, was an accomplished musician and composer. He led the orchestra with the same company that carried his wife's name on the payrolls. Miss Hoffman, aided and abetted by Max, decided to wake up Washington with something real novel. She did.

Miss Hoffman's first local appearance stunned the censor and caused an amazed public to gasp. What Gertrude and her assistants wore on that memorable occasion even beat some of the costumes we see on Pennsylvania avenue today, to a frazzle. The act was a great success and Miss Hoffman won fame as the most nervy woman who ever hit the burg.

Miss Isadore Duncan threw off a few petticoats and such and shot out on a local stage with only the stage electrician to save her at the most critical moments. Other young women who couldn't afford

PAPER WAS PASTED ON PICTURES

In 1900 Show Girls Were Photographed in Eskimo Attire or the Bill-Boards Were Shrouded by a Police Brigade Detailed to Wield Paste Brushes for Art's Sake.

wardrobes soon saw the advantages of that particular line of art and went to it.

About four years ago the managers found themselves up against a tough situation. The beautiful young things who make F street famous were stealing their thunder. What man was going to be sucker enough to pay to come in and see a damsel strutting around in pink fleshings when he could stand down by the Postoffice and gaze at some genuine works of art. A conference was held and it was decided that the ladies of the chorus were wearing too many clothes. By a rising vote of ninety-four to none, it was concluded that nothing but a piece of ribbon should be worn, by the ladies, above the waist line.

The result was most gratifying for a time. The crowds came and expressed their approval of everything but the piece of ribbon. Then again the demure young lady in civil life proved that she can adapt herself to any occasion or fashion. She swiped the ribbon idea outright. Once more the manager tore his hair, until some mighty genius among them thought of Gertrude Hoffman and Isadore Duncan. If one young woman could appear on the stage without the formality of clothes why couldn't a bunch of women do the same thing. Fountain pens and pencils were brought into play. Bookkeepers and auditors were called into a conference, and when informed of the enormous sums of money that could be saved each year by doing away with costumes there was a wild yell of joy, and it was decided that Adam and Eve were the only people that ever had any sense about clothes, anyway.

TIGHTS ARE DISCARDED. The public was educated to the new order of things gradually. At first, perhaps, the ladies of the chorus would appear wearing knee tights and short socks which left a dimpled and delightful section of nature's own creation there before you to be admired. Then a little later on the socks were discarded as being something that belonged to a dead generation. Then came the most daring move of all. Tights became dish rags and chorus girls all over the country began buying cough medicines.

If you have attended any of the modern musical comedies here lately, drop this newspaper, lean back in your chair, close your eyes and think about the costumes—or rather lack of costumes—you saw. Then pick up your paper and look down at the quaint costumes once worn by the idol of the theater-going public of her day, talented Maggie Mitchell. Close your eyes again. Do you remember what the leading lady wore last week. No, because she did not wear anything. Look at the picture of Lotta giving an imitation of Joe Cannon and his cigar. If Lotta appeared before you in that costume today would you flee from the theater in dismay? You might flee, but not because you were shocked, but because you couldn't stand for such modesty.

The female form just as nature gave it to us in her best specimens, is now handed out to our vision nightly at prices ranging from fifty cents to three dollars. For the last named sum you can sit in the front row and give nature a close study without straining your eyes. For a half dollar you can get a seat in the gallery, and if you want to take a chance on breaking your neck, you can lean far out and make sure that the management of the production is not putting any thing over on you.

With all of his success the manager is worried. No censor ever bothers him, though that old regulation about drapery from the neck to two inches below the knees still exists. It can't be enforced now, because if it was a large number of Washington women would be paying fines. It is these same women who have got the managers worried. You can never guess what they will do next. Already they have displayed their dimpled knees in public and it behooves the producer to be ever on the alert and to keep one step ahead of the lady in civil life.